



The Hand That Holds You Down by musicboxmemories (KendraLuehr)

Category: Hannibal (TV), Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: 1980s, Alternate Universe, Alternate Universe - Canon, Crossover, Crossover Pairings, F/M, First Kiss, Fluff and Angst, Forbidden Love, Friendship/Love, Hurt/Comfort, Sad Ending, Separations, Tragic Romance, Young Love, and i explore abigail being forced to help her serial killer father, but with a twist where she has an unlikely support system, in which everything is set in the 80s, lead-ins to s1 of both shows

Language: English

Characters: Abigail Hobbs, Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Jack Crawford, Louise Hobbs, Marissa Schurr, Steve Harrington, Steve's Parents, Will Graham

Relationships: Abigail Hobbs & Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs & Louise Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs & Marissa Schurr, Steve Harrington & Abigail Hobbs, Steve Harrington/Abigail Hobbs

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Summary:

When Steve Harrington is uprooted to Bloomington, Minnesota, he discovers an unlikely friendship with Abigail Hobbs. She appears to be a bright, normal teenage girl with bright, normal aspirations, but the closer they grow, the more he realizes how wrong that assumption is. (Prequel/AU to both S1 of *Hannibal* and *Stranger Things*.)

1. The New Guy

Author's Note:

Admittedly, this only came to be because I made a crossover fan vid a couple days ago (I'll link everyone below). At a glance, I suppose it doesn't make much sense, crossover-wise, but I wanted to explore Abigail's time before *Hannibal* with high school characters I love and feel might mesh well. This is a frightening time for Abigail, and I thought Steve would be a great character for her to interact with. He's both kind-hearted and male, which are two things that Abigail has been taught don't coincide. Upon meeting Steve, she begins to question everything her father ever taught/warned her about, thus slowly unraveling her into the young woman she became in S1.

For this particular AU, everything is set in the 80s like on *Stranger Things*, but Steve is presently in Abigail's hometown of Bloomington, Minnesota. That actually works great since the *Hannibal* trilogy wasn't depicting present day (it spanned the 80s and 90s, if I recall correctly), so in a way, the setting is a nod to Thomas Harris' original world, as well.

This first chapter begins mostly through Abigail's POV, because I feel that between the two of them, she's the one who needed the most framework laid down first. Steve will be much more prevalent in the next chapter, and we'll get to learn more about his history/home life. I don't foresee this being a terribly long fic, but I do know I want it to end a little after S1 of *Hannibal* begins. With that said, I hope you won't find it too weird of a mix, and that you'll enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it!



When Abigail entered homeroom that morning, she felt as if she were in a trance. Eyes wide and hands shaking, she moved to her desk and heavily had a seat, the tang of bile filling her mouth as she recalled her father's words from the night before.

I kill girls, Abigail. I want to stop – I swear I do – but if I don't keep killing, I'll have to kill you instead. Do you understand what I'm telling you, puffin?

No. She *didn't* understand, and most jarring of all was that this wasn't a dream. The man she'd trusted her entire life – her *hero* who'd slain imaginary creatures under her bed, kissed her wounds, and cheered for her when she'd needed support – was a *monster*. He had seemed wholly normal last week... Was he sick? Is that how aberrant behavior started? Garrett Jacob Hobbs hadn't shown Abigail any actual evidence, but whenever he'd come into her room to confess, he'd had an empty, haunted look to his eyes that she'd never seen before.

Her real father was gone.

"Wow, check out the package on *this* stud."

Abigail's best friend, Marissa Schurr, grinned as she scooted her desk in closer. There was a bright, mischievous gleam to her eyes as she handed over the magazine.

Abigail balked. Promptly slamming it closed, her head still swam as she struggled to both process her home life and act like a normal, everyday teenage girl. "You...w-why would you bring this to class?" she managed to choke. "There are naked men in here..."

Marissa scoffed. "*Duh*, it's a Playgirl. Amy from third period traded it for a hair scrunchie. Would you *believe* that?" Retrieving the magazine with a sly grin, she added, "Besides, I *know* you haven't seen a naked man before, so I figured I'd do you a solid. The only downside is these men make *these* guys..." She gestured around the room. "...seem inferior in every possible way. I can guarantee that no one in here is over five inches."

Dropping her head into her hands, Abigail groaned and began to massage her temples. Usually, Marissa's insatiable curiosity about men amused, and sometimes even *inspired* Abigail, but today, her stomach was churning far too much for her to concentrate.

"Hey, are you okay?"

Lifting her head, Abigail glanced over to see Marissa's eyes shining with worry. "You're super pale... Do you need to see a nurse or something?"

Shaking her head, Abigail released a breath. "No, no, I just...I had a rough morning, that's all. I didn't get much sleep either."

"Gotcha." Marissa, herself, had a volatile home life, so she never questioned anyone else's. "I think I've got just what you need."

Before Abigail could protest, Marissa glanced at the teacher, Mrs. Glassman (who was thankfully too caught up in a romance novel to be bothered), then pulled a silver flask from her backpack.

Abigail's eyes widened. "Rissa, are you *crazy*? I can't have that... My dad would-"

"He *won't* find out," Marissa insisted. "Besides, there's only a little bit left. Earlier this morning, I shared most of it with Troy."

Twisting her mouth in apprehension, Abigail glanced at their teacher before snatching the flask. "You are *such* an enabler."

"The best," Marissa agreed with a wink. "It's my stepdad's, so you *know* that asshole won't even realize it's gone. He's too piss-drunk to notice much of anything these days."

Tucking the flask into her backpack, Abigail straightened just as a tall, unfamiliar young man entered the classroom.

Mrs. Glassman looked up with a soft, "Oh! There you are, young man. Class, this is our newest addition to the Kennedy Eagles family, Steve Harrington. I trust you'll all give him a proper welcome?"

Marissa grinned wolfishly. "Oh, I'll give him a 'proper welcome,' alright..."

Abigail ignored her. When Steve glanced their way, she promptly ducked her eyes and pretended to be engrossed with her textbook. Her father had always warned her about men – that they were filthy, disgusting creatures who only wanted "one thing," and that they should be avoided at all costs. The result made Abigail feel ashamed any time a boy even *looked* at her. Had she brought it on herself, she wondered? Was their attraction something *she* had done? Her father certainly seemed to think so...

"He's cute, right?"

Releasing a breath, Abigail glanced at Marissa with impatience. "Who?"

"The new guy, of course! And from what I can tell, he'll need a guide of sorts to show him around. Might as well be us, right?"

Abigail dared another glance at Steve, then promptly shook her head. "What about Troy?"

"What *about* him? I only keep Troy around since he does literally *anything* I ask. He's also a four-incher."

Abigail made a face. "What, so you measure all your boyfriends now?"

"Of course not! I just have an excellent mathematical eye."

"And yet you're failing trig. Fancy that."

"Nobody asked you, Little Miss Top of Her Class."

Abigail laughed, only to clam up once Steve sat down directly in front of her. She knew without looking that Marissa was grinning.

The bell rang, and Abigail gratefully snatched up her belongings.

"Catch you in math?" Marissa asked.

Abigail nodded, avoiding Steve's questioning glance as she hustled down the aisle.

Abigail was *not* the type to cut class. School enamored her, and she loved to learn and socialize, so it was quite out of character that she'd taken Marissa's flask and headed for the parking lot. Admittedly, she was only cutting gym – the least important of her studies, as far as she was concerned – and as she sat behind the wheel of her old Ford, she exhaled and unscrewed the cap to her flask. Her adrenaline was pumping, and she still felt jittery as she took a generous swallow. The liquid burned and made her cough. Unlike her friends, she was *not* that experienced with alcohol. She was typically far too afraid to rebel. Now, however, she was angry and hurt and sought an outlet that she *knew* would upset her father.

"Hey!"

Abigail shrieked, nearly dropping her flask as a familiar face popped up by her passenger window. That boy from earlier, Steve Harrington, grinned while giving a cheeky wave.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," he said. Now pointing to her flask, he added, "Drinking on school property? I may be new and all, but I'm pretty sure that's frowned upon."

Abigail scoffed. "Yeah, well so is stalking."

"I'm not stalking you," he promised. "It's a nice day, so I figured I'd take a look around."

"*Outside?*"

"Well yeah, the outdoors are part of the school too, aren't they? Mrs. Glassman said I could take a personal tour."

"I'm pretty sure she meant *inside*."

"You mean where *you're* supposed to be?" When Abigail paled, Steve laughed and assured her, "Relax, I'm not a snitch. Though I *may* be more inclined to keep quiet if you let me have some of that booze. Whiskey, I'm guessing?"

"It's...something like that," Abigail agreed. Admittedly, she was unsure and just drinking it for the sake of drinking. She chewed her lip. The idea of being alone with a boy for the first time – *truly* alone – was both frightening and exhilarating, and since she *knew* it would infuriate her father, she gestured for Steve to join her.

He grinned and slid into the passenger seat. "Thanks. You mind if I smoke?"

Abigail felt her heart warble. She could hide a few drinks from her dad, but smoking? Her clothes would reek for days.

"I'd rather you didn't," she said.

"Fair enough." He accepted the flask with a smile. "I'm Steve, by the way."

"I know who you are."

"Right, of course...the girl from homeroom. But where I'm from, it is usually customary to introduce yourself in return, especially to the guy holding your flask."

Abigail swallowed. "I'm, uh...I'm Abigail. Abigail Hobbs."

"You live close by, Abigail?"

"Yes... I've lived in Bloomington my whole life."

"Lucky. I've been uprooted at least five times," Steve said. "My dad's job requires travel, so we're never in one place for too long. If you could believe it, we just moved here from Hawaii."

Abigail arched a brow. "Really? Wow...you sure got the short end of *that* stick."

"It's not so bad," Steve assured her. "Cold as hell, but I'll get used to it."

"Well, Minnesota is known for being cold... That, and our accents."

"Which you don't have."

"Which I don't have," she agreed. "In fact, very few of us do in this area. TV shows and movies would have you believe that we tack 'don'tcha know?' onto the end of every sentence."

Steve laughed, taking a slow swallow of whiskey. "Well to be fair, the accent is kind of cute."

"You don't seem to have one...I guess you're from one of the midland states?"

"Delaware," he said. "As soon as I start adapting to one place, we're moving on to another, so accents can't really be formed when that happens."

"Or friendships."

"Yeah." He shrugged, taking another swallow. "No harm in trying though, right?"

Abigail's stomach flipped. If she tried to make friends now – if she tried *advancing* her popularity – she could very well get another girl killed. She could practically *feel* her father looming above her.

"Abigail?"

Shaking her head, Abigail tucked a lock of hair behind her ear.

"Sorry, um...I was just thinking how class is almost over, so I should probably get back inside."

Steve blinked. "Sooo, you want to go back to a class you've already missed?"

"No, lunch is going to start soon."

"Okay, I'll join you."

"NO! I-I mean... I'm supposed to eat with a few friends, and I'm not sure how they'd feel about having you there," Abigail lied. "There's always a crisis, and I doubt they'd want you hearing their drama. I can barely stand it myself."

Opening his car door, Steve stepped out into the parking lot as Abigail followed his lead. "Same time tomorrow?"

"I don't think so," she said. "I don't normally cut class, but today it was just...I needed to." Chewing her lip, she added, "I don't normally drink, either."

Steve shrugged, now handing over Marissa's flask. "No need to explain. We've all got issues, Abigail, so I won't judge you for them. I just wish you didn't feel the need to lie to me."

Abigail bristled. "That's an awfully presumptuous thing for a stranger to say."

"I may be a stranger, but I'm not an idiot. Catch you later."

Panicked, Abigail followed after Steve with her eyes. What had she done? What had she *said* to garner that type of response? If she didn't learn to adapt now, she'd be striking the proverbial nail into her coffin.

2. A Pending Disaster

"Shit..." Gaping down at the large, unmistakable scratch on the side of his car, Steve could already hear his dad's over the top ranting and raving. About a year ago, his father had actually handed him the keys to the Mustang (no doubt at his mother's provocation), so he *knew* he wouldn't be getting off easy. Steve's father had a built-in radar for every little screw-up he'd ever committed. Some parents had a list of their children's accomplishments, but Craig Harrington literally had a folder full of Steve's failures. He'd claimed they would help shape his son into a better man. And now that someone had grazed the side of the family car? Yeah. Steve *knew* he was undeniably, one-hundred percent fucked.

"Hey, bud!"

Steve jerked up, turning as Troy Smithfield approached with a huge, smarmy grin.

"You gonna shoot some hoops with us today, or what?"

"I'd like to be on the team," Steve agreed. "I've played at all my other schools, so I might as well tack this one onto the list." Still feeling queasy over the prospect of speaking with his father, Steve sighed and tucked a hand into his pocket. "So how late does practice usually go?"

"Usually 'til around five."

Perfect. Perhaps if he came home *after* his father, Craig wouldn't even notice. As Steve contemplated this potential good fortune, he spotted Abigail and Marissa heading toward the school entrance. He instantly perked up. "Hey, uh...what do you know about that girl over there? The one with the skirt?"

Troy turned his head. "Who, Abigail Hobbs? Nothing really. She's my girl's best friend, but she's kinda weird, y'know? She never goes to any parties or wants to hang out."

Steve shrugged. "Maybe that's just not her scene."

Troy made a dismissive noise. "Whatever, she's still a dweeb. And if you don't watch yourself, *you* might become a dweeb, too."

"I think I'll take my chances. See you 'round." Sparing Troy a half-hearted wave, Steve turned and headed after the retreating girls. Whenever he finally caught up with them, he could hear Marissa and Abigail talking lowly and giggling.

"Hey, Abigail."

All at once, the giggling stopped.

Appearing discomfited, Abigail hugged her books as Marissa spared Steve a sly glance with her large, cat-like eyes. "Abby," she cooed, "I didn't know you were friends with Bloomington's most eligible bachelor."

Steve flashed a good-natured smile. "The one and only." Nodding to Abigail, he asked, "Can I talk to you for a sec?"

Paling, Abigail looked to Marissa for help, but then, upon realizing that she wouldn't be getting it, promptly shook her head. "I'm going to be late for class."

"Oh c'mon, it'll only take a minute."

"Sorry, but I have to go." Abigail turned and began to stalk off, only to tense up in frustration as Steve followed close behind. When she glanced back at him, he appeared hurt.

"Why are you acting like I've got the plague?"

Abigail halted in her tracks, guilt bleeding through her like an open wound. She often felt obligated to please others, and his blatant pain wasn't helping the situation. But she *knew* that if she continued to talk to Steve, something bad would happen. Her father would see to that.

"Look..." Abigail sighed, now appraising him with sharp eyes. "I'm *not* interested in being friends, okay? Yesterday was just... I was feeling vulnerable."

Steve frowned. "What did I tell you earlier about lying to me?"

Abigail scoffed. "Wow. Egotistical *and* an asshole? Just my luck."

"I never meant-"

"I'm sorry," she cut in. "It's just...I've never had someone like *you* interested in someone like *me* before. I know it's no excuse, but I genuinely don't know what to make of you."

Incredulous, Steve flashed her a disbelieving smile. "How about I just want to be friends? My parents are going to be out of town this weekend, so I wanted to invite you over."

"What?"

"For a party."

Abigail relaxed, but only marginally. Despite the fact he didn't wish to be alone with her, parties were still a taboo subject in the Hobbs family household. She'd snuck off to one once, and had been grounded for five months.

"I, um...I'd better not. I'm not really into parties."

"So I've heard. I-I mean, uh...you don't really look like the type, but I figured I'd ask anyway."

Abigail nervously fiddled with her books. Was she really *that* transparent?

"Who will be at this party?"

Steve's eyes lit up, his smile growing boyish as he leaned against a neighboring locker. "Anyone you want."

Abigail arched a brow. "Okay, so a party *you're* hosting is going to have anyone *I* want? Not really sure about the logistics there, but it sounds bearable."

"So you'll come?"

"I never said-"

"No, but you want to – I can tell," Steve cut in. "C'mon, it'll be fun. And if for *any* reason you decide you want to leave, I'll blow everyone off and take you home. How's that sound?"

Abigail swallowed. Steve could *not* meet her father.

"I, um...I'll ask Marissa."

"Great! Catch you in Spanish?"

"Sí, mi encantador idiota."

"What?"

"Um...nothing. See you later." Breaking away with a blush in her cheeks, Abigail winced when Marissa instantly appeared at her side. "You've been waiting to strike this entire time, haven't you?"

Marissa scoffed. "You make me sound like a bird of prey. I am *far* more soulless than that." With a grin, she nudged Abigail's ribs. "Sooo, what did he want to talk about?"

"Nothing, really...he's just having a party."

"Shit, really? He *does* know you're 'Minnesota's Sweetheart,' right?"

Abigail shrugged. "I think I want to go."

This time, Marissa appeared genuinely stunned. "No way... Are you *sure* you're Abigail Hobbs?" Playfully, she made a show of rapping on her friend's forehead. "Helloooo in there – please return my best friend, and *pronto*, 'cause I need to copy off her math homework."

With a self-conscious smile, Abigail gently pushed Marissa's hand away. "I know I don't like parties," she agreed, "but maybe this one will be different. Steve seems like a nice guy."

Marissa shook her head. "Oh honey, trust me – *all* guys are the same."

"What do you mean? You think he just wants...?"

"Most definitely. I mean, you have an amazing personality, but guys tend to choose bra size over humor and intelligence. It's just the way the world works."

With a scowl, Abigail defiantly shook her head. "It's literally impossible for *all* men to be the exact same. I don't think I'm wrong about him...even though we only just met. Which I know makes me sound *really* stupid, but before now, the thought of befriending a guy has kind of made me feel...uncomfortable."

Marissa shifted her books to her hip. "I find that totally unrelatable, but for your sake, I hope you're right."

In the blink of an eye, the school principal, Mr. Sullivan, appeared at their side. "Ah, there you are!" he exclaimed. "I've been looking all over for you, Miss Hobbs. Would you mind accompanying me to the office, please? Your father's requested a brief word."

Stricken, Abigail tried not to appear as terrified as she felt. "Okay," she choked. After saying goodbye to Marissa, she followed Mr. Sullivan through the crowded hall toward the front office. As they moved, she *knew* everyone was staring at her. Just her luck...

"Here we are," Mr. Sullivan announced. Opening the double doors, he showed Abigail inside and led her off to a more secluded side room. "Your father has requested a moment, so I'll leave you to it. I trust you'll return to class afterwards? You can get Miss Sinclair to write you a tardy pass."

Abigail nodded, so Mr. Sullivan took that as his cue to leave. He clearly felt nettled that he'd been asked to be the errand boy for the day.

Hesitant, Abigail's heart leapt in her throat as she slowly peered into the offered room. Her father turned and smiled, his blue eyes deceptively disarming as he motioned for her to shut the door.

"Hey there, puffin. How's school?"

Hugging her books to her chest, Abigail shrugged. "I dunno...it

literally just started."

Undeterred, Hobbs moved toward his daughter. "Everything's all settled," he whispered, finally dropping the pretense. "About an hour ago, I booked us a tour at Minnesota State. I figured we might be able to find a doe there for our hunt."

A doe?

Feeling sick to her stomach, Abigail began nervously fiddling with the neckline to her shirt. "I know you think that's a good idea, but... I've applied to go to school there."

Hobbs' mouth tensed. About a month ago, college had been a huge source of contention for them. He hadn't wanted Abigail to go – hadn't wanted her to *leave* – but Louise had sided with their daughter, and more or less, the family had fractured. And now that Abigail thought about it, her father's behavior had grown more and more aberrant ever since... Was *she* responsible for her dad's sudden lapse?

Tasting bile at the thought, Abigail shakily tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. "What do you need me to do?"

"Nothing. I just wanted you to be aware that tomorrow, we'll be taking an all-day trip that could last well into Sunday, depending on whether or not we have complications."

Abigail paled. "But...what will we tell mom?"

"The truth. We're going hunting." With a gleeful smile, Hobbs took hold of her shoulders and kissed her forehead. "It'll be just like old times, won't it, puffin?"

With a shattered smile, Abigail nodded and ducked her head.

"Hey! Mind if I sit down?"

Looking up from her lunch tray, Abigail smiled grimly and nodded. "If you want to completely kill your chances of popularity, then by all means."

Steve huffed and had a seat alongside her. "Somehow, I doubt that."

Abigail shifted, startled by his sudden closeness. From this angle, she could feel his body heat and she leaned away from him, her cheeks growing flushed as she crossed her legs.

"You don't know me," she softly offered. "I'm known as 'the weird, quiet one.'"

"Oh, c'mon." Picking an apple off his tray, Steve grinned and angled his body toward her own. "They're just mad 'cause when we graduate, *you* are going to be the one with a job. And by the way? Thank you for the compliment."

"What?"

"You called me charming." Taking a bite of apple, his grin grew decidedly smug. "Granted, I had to ask someone what '*mi encantador idiota*' even meant, but I'm choosing to ignore the idiot part."

Abigail squirmed. "Oh..."

"I'm guessing you're not used to people with initiative. If a cute girl calls me something I don't know, I'm damn well going to look into it."

Rolling her eyes, Abigail tried to hide her smile. It was odd, she thought, how this boy could sooth the raging storm in her stomach. She still felt sick with worry, absolutely, but he was allowing her a much-needed distraction.

"So did you give any further thought to what I asked?"

All at once, Abigail's smile faded. "You mean the party?"

Steve chuckled. "I *would* say something sarcastic, but since I like you, I won't."

Why? Abigail wondered. **Why** do you like me?

But rather than add unnecessary dissent, she shrugged and poked at her mashed potatoes. "As it turns out, I have plans."

"So soon?"

"My dad stopped by...tomorrow, we're going to spend the day together."

"On a school day?"

"Yep."

"Lucky you. And what about that evening?"

"I'll be too tired."

And that much had to be true, Abigail thought, because if she truly *was* about to help her dad pick his next victim, she knew that the absolute *last* thing she could handle was being in a room full of crowded, whooped-up peers.

"Maybe I could come to you?"

"What?"

"After the party, I could stop by with some leftover beers." A sudden smile tugged at Steve's lips. "Then again, there probably won't be any beer left at all...that's just wishful thinking."

"If Marissa's going to be there, then yes, that'd definitely be the case." Abigail offered a tired smile. "I really want to come, Steve, but I can't."

"Maybe some other time then?"

"Yeah, maybe." *If I'm not in prison by then.*

The bell rang, and Steve rose with his backpack slung over his shoulder. "Shall I accompany you to Spanish, m'lady? And don't ask me to actually *give* the request in Spanish, 'cause I can't."

Abigail rose on unsteady limbs. "Well, at least you're honest."

After dumping their trays, the two turned and headed for the nearest hall.

"I'm getting some bad vibes from you...are you worried about our test?"

Abigail paled. "Test?"

"Well, I don't have to take it since I'm new," Steve said, "but I still know about it. Everyone's been complaining all day."

Shit, shit, shit! In between school and her family drama, Abigail had chosen to slack in the one place that actually brought her solace.

Steve seemed to sense her distress. "Look, if you want, I can see about getting you someone's notes?"

Abigail shook her head.

"Well, if you're sure... I've heard this is twenty-five percent of our grade. And if you're not careful, you'll be a doe caught in the crosshairs."

Abigail's stomach flipped. Images of screaming, pleading girls flashed across her eyes – *girls who looked just like her* – and with a dry sob, she broke away from him and went tearing down the hallway.

Steve jerked in astonishment. "Whoa, hey... *Abigail!*"

She didn't listen. Bursting out the side door, she ran and ran and ran until she got to the parking lot, and didn't truly stop to breathe again until she was speeding off in her car.

Notes for the Chapter:

Okay, so I lied. I wanted to delve more into Steve's background in this chapter, but Abigail kept demanding my attention. So let's just say "someday" and leave it at that, lol. Thanks to those who're reading!

3. The Hunt Begins

"Now remember, Steve: Mrs. Donahue's number is on the fridge, should you need anything, and I've left you a bit of-"

"Yeah, mom, I know. You've told me already." With a good-natured smile, he accepted her cheek kiss. "You'll be back Sunday, right?"

She nodded. "If your father's business exchange lasts a little longer, we'll be sure to let you know."

Craig entered the room then, not even looking up as he re-adjusted his cuff links. "Come along, Martha, we're going to be late. You can always phone the boy after school, should you wish to speak with him."

Martha pursed her mouth. "Well, I just think that-"

"What is that *godawful* smell?" Sending Steve an accusatory look, Craig snapped, "Have you been getting into your mother's hairspray again? How many times have I told you to straighten up and be a man?"

"Frequently, sir." Steve's expression hardened.

"This is *your* fault," Craig accused his wife. "Maybe if you didn't always coddle that boy-"

"Don't you have a plane to catch?" Red-faced and glassy-eyed, Steve clenched his fists. "I'd hate for you to miss out on that big work opportunity."

Placing his hat onto his head, Craig nodded. "Let's go then, Martha. And Steve?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Grow up."

Martha spared her son an apologetic look, kissed his forehead, and then followed after her fuming husband like a dutiful puppy.

Steve kicked a nearby stool. Fucking *asshole*.

When Hobbs went to fetch his daughter, Abigail was already wide awake. She sat unseeing in front of her vanity, tying her hair back into a tight, yet messy ponytail. It was rare that she wore her hair back, so she figured that would work to her advantage. Sometimes hair aided as the ultimate disguise.

With a smile, Hobbs rapped on the door frame. "You ready to go, puffin?"

Abigail nodded. How could he act so *cheerful* about all of this? They were going to slaughter a girl, not go out for fun and milkshakes.

"Marissa has been calling all morning. Did you not tell that girl we're going out of town?"

Abigail winced, slowly rising from her vanity. "She's probably calling because of a party. She wanted me to come, but...as you know, I would never. Not without your permission."

To her surprise, her father's face transformed into something akin to pleasure. "That's very good," he decided. "If anyone asks, we can say you were at that party this evening, and that I was at home. Those kids will be too drunk to know the difference."

Abigail appeared perplexed. "But-"

"The further we are from the pending crime scene, the better. No one needs to know we stayed in town." Motioning behind him, he added, "Go ahead and call your friend. Tell her you'll see her sometime this evening."

Abigail felt her heart leap. "So... I'm actually going to-?"

"No, you're not going to go," Hobbs cut in, "but people will *think* you went, and that's what matters. That Schurr girl couldn't keep a secret

even if her life depended on it."

Abigail swallowed, tasting bile. "Okay...I'll call her."

"That's my girl."

Stepping past him, she moved akin to one in a trance as she fetched the phone from the kitchen. After dialing Marissa's number, Abigail began to nervously twist the cord around her finger as she waited.

"Hello?"

"Hey Rissa, it's me."

"It's about time, Abs! I've been calling you all morning!"

"I know, I'm sorry... I was getting ready to go out." Passing a hand through her hair, she swallowed. "Listen, um...my dad said I could go to Steve's party tonight, so I'll see you there."

"No way, really? Shit, I'll have to save you a beer!"

Abigail had to smile. "That's a real sacrifice on your part."

"Shut up." She could tell Marissa was grinning. "I'm really glad you're feeling better, Abby. For a while there, I was starting to get worried."

"Why?"

"Well, for one, you've been acting really weird lately, and I didn't know if it was just some bizarre type of phase, or what."

Abigail swallowed. "No, um...no, I'm fine."

"Well, great! I've gotta jet, but I'll catch you sometime this evening?"

"Wouldn't miss it – see you later." Feeling hollow, Abigail hung up and sighed through her nose. Evidently, she would have to try *much* harder with her pretense.

The college hall was considerably crowded. While prospective students milled around with their parents, Abigail and Hobbs stationed themselves where they had the best view of the crowd.

"There," Hobbs whispered. "By the restrooms."

Following his line of vision, Abigail felt sick when she spotted the pale, blue-eyed brunette in question. She could've easily been her own sister...her own *friend*.

"I need to use the restroom," Abigail said aloud. The transition was clumsy, and Hobbs shot her a warning glare. It sickened her to the very core.

Swallowing back bile, she again looked to her father's chosen girl. She appeared to be quiet and alone, and every few moments, her kind blue eyes would lift from her book. She seemed interested in the crowd, but too shy to join in. The observation was almost enough to make Abigail vomit. When she looked back at Hobbs, he glowered a moment before pretending to be interested in his watch. That seemed to be her cue...

Instantly, Abigail switched into a bright, bubbly persona, her eyes lighting up and her lips lifting as she walked towards the girl. All at once, she stopped. "Oh my God, I love your shirt!" she exclaimed. "Is that vintage?"

Shyly, the girl looked up from her book and smiled. "It was my mom's when she was my age," she said.

"Oh, how cool!" Feeling the conversation beginning to flounder, she added, "What are you reading?"

Chewing her lip, the girl ducked her head. "It's nothing, really...just a book called *Rebecca*. I really like the classics. Oh, um...I'm Jessica, by the way."

Abigail's smile grew tight. This young, vibrant girl – no, *Jessica* (God, why did she have to give her name?) – would soon be lying cold and lifeless in her father's cabin. Unless she did something to help

her? *No, no, she couldn't...* it was either her or this girl.

"I'm Mandy," Abigail lied. Her mouth grew dry, and her tongue began sticking to the roof of her mouth. "Is this your first campus visit? This is my third...I feel like I should start narrowing things down by now, y'know?"

"Oh, yeah?" Jessica beamed, now closing her book. "I'm actually already a student. I'm just too curious for my own good and had to check out the potential newbies. I mean, it's only my first semester, but it's pretty great here. What are you hoping to study?"

"Art," Abigail said, which wasn't a complete lie.

"Oh, awesome! We have a great art department here," Jessica said. "Do you want me to show you around?"

Abigail spared her father a terrified glance, then nodded slowly. She knew Hobbs had his truck parked out near the woodsy part of campus. Sometime during this venture, she was supposed to learn where the girl lived and whether or not she'd be alone. Deep down, Abigail begged and pleaded for Jessica to live in a dorm and not an apartment.

"So, um..." Abigail swallowed around the dryness of her throat. "What's campus life like? Is it better to live in the dorms? Or maybe an apartment?"

"Oh, you definitely want to get an apartment!" Jessica said enthusiastically. "They're totally affordable with a roommate."

Abigail grimaced. "Really? So they're pretty nice?"

"Oh, yeah. Ours is *huge*. You know, it's only a 10-minute walk from here, so I could totally show you if you wanted."

"Would your roommate be okay with that?"

Jessica nodded. "She's actually visiting her boyfriend all weekend, so it's just me."

Abigail felt her heart sink. This was it. *This* was their girl, and as her

stomach rolled over with nausea, she knew Jessica was perfect for what her father had planned.

"That sounds awesome," she finally offered. Following Jessica down the hall, Abigail couldn't help but imagine what college would be like for real. In spite of Jessica's doomed future, she was starting to envy the simplicity of the girl's life. It hardly seemed fair how some had it all, while others had nothing but despair.

The 10 minutes passed with idle conversation. Abigail asked what the boys were like (a mundane, but safe topic), which sent Jessica off on a tangent about her long-distance romance. Maybe Jessica's boyfriend would be her saving grace... Abigail hoped he got concerned enough to call the police, or maybe even stop by that evening as a surprise.

When they arrived, Abigail took note of the apartment number and overall layout. From this vantage point, the first floor was low enough that going in through the window was feasible, and there only seemed to be a security camera in the front lobby. While Jessica showed her around, Abigail discreetly unlocked the girl's bedroom window. *It's her or me*, she inwardly chanted. *It's her. Or. Me.*

"So anyway, I guess you have to get back to the tour now? Gimme your hand and I'll write down my number." While Jessica grabbed a pen, Abigail hung back, allowing the girl to scribble out her number with a heaviness in her chest. It would be so easy to tell Jessica the truth – to warn her and beg her to go to the police – but her lips remained clamped shut, and she forced a smile as they parted ways. She knew Hobbs would be waiting at his truck.

Legs feeling like rubber, Abigail tried to steady her breathing as she immediately lost her bubbly persona – a mask she knew she'd have to don time and time again. Terror-stricken, she wondered what the magic number was – how many girls would it take until Hobbs stopped? Would it be a matter of how many were enough for him, or would it be until he was caught? Until *they* were caught?

Nervously tugging at her collar, Abigail suddenly felt much, *much* too hot. Perhaps casing the apartment with her dad's victim had been a mistake. Despite the fact she'd been careful, she couldn't help but think she was somewhere in the campus security footage. If they

looked for Jessica, they might see that footage and then look for her next...

As anticipated, Abigail found Hobbs waiting for her by his truck. She straightened her stance, but promptly lowered her eyes, as she often did in his presence these days.

"Get in," he told her. "I'll drive you to the hotel. From there, I'll get you a cab. I don't want you here for what happens next."

Nodding numbly, Abigail slid into the truck and leaned away as her father did the same.

"Did you do well for me, puffin?"

Tears stung Abigail's eyes, but she did not cry. "I..." Swallowing back bile, she tried again, "She's alone this weekend. Her name's Jessica, and-

"No." Hobbs cut her off, causing her eyes to lift in alarm. "We never name the girls, Abby. We don't name the deer for the very same reason. Naming something makes it human, and thereby harder to hurt."

She is human, Abigail bitterly thought. Nevertheless, she shivered and said, "Yes, dad. I...I'm sorry. But you'll be happy to know she has a long-distance boyfriend, so there won't be anyone else around. She's studying this evening."

Hobbs leaned over and pressed a kiss to her temple. "You've done well, puffin. I'm proud of you."

Abigail felt shame for being *glad* for his praise. Even now, she still craved her father's approval.

The cab ride home was expensive, but paid in full with her father's cash. Ignoring the driver's farewell, Abigail snuck past her mother

(who was too busy watching TV to notice), and crept upstairs to her bedroom. She felt sick. In that moment, she knew what was going on – or rather, what *would* be going on – with Jessica.

A loud *thwack* sounded against her window, and Abigail jerked back with a gasp. *What the hell?*

Yet another rock followed soon after, and to her surprise, when she peered out her bedroom window, she spotted Steve down in her backyard.

Panicking, Abigail opened her window and leaned out with a warning glare. "What are you doing here?" she hissed.

With a cheeky grin, Steve held up a six pack. "Marissa told me you were coming tonight, but when you became a no-show, I decided to take the party to you."

Abigail glanced over her shoulder, trying to ensure that her mother was still oblivious. After deciding that yes, the coast was still clear, she turned back to Steve with a shake of her head. "You can't stay here," she warned. "My parents will freak."

"Is that why you bailed?"

"Yes."

Tucking the beer beneath his arm, Steve began scaling the drain pipe like a true cat burglar. Once he was on the roof, Abigail began to fear for his safety (and in more ways than one).

Steve appeared in front of her with a grin. "Aren't you going to let me in? Or is there some kind of password?"

Quivering, Abigail's stern facade crumbled and she burst into tears, causing Steve to regard her in alarm.

"Whoa, whoa, hey...are you alright? What's going on?"

Collapsing against his chest, Abigail threw her arms around his neck and held on tight, sobbing into Steve's shoulder as he struggled to both comfort her and place the beer onto the windowsill. Bewildered,

he passed his fingers through her hair and nudged his cheek into her temple.

"Hey, it's alright," he soothed. "I've got you."

No, she bitterly thought, *you don't*. At this point, *nothing* could save her, and she didn't know why she *wanted* to be saved, least especially if this was her future.

Hiding her face in Steve's neck, Abigail wept and weakly sagged into his arms.

"Please don't lie to me anymore," he whispered. "Can you just talk to me? Please?"

When Abigail shook her head, Steve nodded, but didn't keep pushing. "Alright," he agreed, "I won't ask again. But I *am* going to stay here until you calm down. Is that okay?"

Nodding, Abigail hiccupped and held him tighter.

Careful in his movements, Steve coaxed Abigail into sitting on her bed, then gently drew her in to curl along his flank. Rubbing her arm, he kissed her hair and closed his eyes. "Y'know, my home life is shit, too," he softly said. "Even if it feels like it now, you're not alone."

Abigail laughed humorlessly. Steve didn't know the half of it. And as sweet as he was being, she *knew* there was no way he would want to stay in her life if he learned the truth. He'd find her abhorrent and monstrous.

"My dad's sick," she blurted. Cringing, Abigail panicked over her sudden slip-up and bit her tongue.

Steve's eyes widened. "Oh, shit," he swore. "Oh man, I'm so sorry... Is he...? I-I mean-"

"I dunno if there's a cure," she cut in. "My dad's not himself, but I can't lose hope."

"No," Steve agreed, "of course not." Nudging his cheek into her hair, he gently squeezed her around the shoulders. "I know it's probably a

worthless question, but...is there anything I can do?"

"No," Abigail whispered, defeated, "but I'd really like for you to stay a while."

"That I can do," he promised. "How about I stay 'til you fall asleep?" When Abigail nodded, Steve encouraged her to recline on her bed, then carefully helped her beneath the covers. "You comfortable?"

Abigail burrowed in closer to him, tears pricking her eyes as she reached for his hand. Steve responded by squeezing her fingers, then with a soft sob, she rolled over into his shoulder. Her father was wrong – her father was *wrong*. All men were *not* inherently evil, and Steve Harrington was proof of that. And as she slowly relaxed in his comforting embrace, Abigail finally drifted off with more safety and calm than she'd ever known.

4. Marissa's Party

When Abigail slowly came to consciousness, she felt pleasantly warm. With a soft, kittenish sigh, she burrowed into Steve's arms and held him around the waist, her cheek edging into his chest while his heart beat steadily against her ear. She found it oddly soothing. After helping her father take a life, it was nice to be around another living, breathing human being.

A soft kiss pressed to her forehead, and blearily, Abigail opened her eyes.

Steve smiled sleepily at her from across the pillow. "Morning," he mumbled. "I'd make you pancakes, but this isn't my house."

Abigail instantly became alert. In a panic, she shot upright and looked around her, checking her clock to find that it was 7:30 a.m. "You can't stay here," she hissed. Ripping the covers off her legs, she staggered out of bed and reached for the six pack on the windowsill. "My parents are early risers, and we always have breakfast together on the weekends."

"Abigail?"

She froze. Looking fearfully to Steve, she mouthed, "It's my mom..."

"Abby, honey? Are you awake? I thought I heard you get up..."

In spite of the direness of their situation, Steve had to laugh. "Wow, is she a cyborg or something? She's got great ears!"

"Get out," Abigail hissed. Handing him the beer, she opened the window and began fiercely pointing in a sharp, comical fashion, causing Steve to laugh even harder.

"Will you call me later, at least?"

"Yes, okay? Just go!"

"I'm holding you to that." Straddling the windowsill, Steve leaned over and pressed a kiss to her cheek. "Come to Marissa's party with

me tonight, maybe? Since you bailed on mine?"

Flustered, Abigail's face turned a brilliant scarlet. "W-well, I..."

"Abby?" Her mother was just down the hall now.

"Shit," Steve swore. "I'll, um...how 'bout I call you instead?"

"No, no, I'll call you," Abigail promised. She knew her dad couldn't find out, lest he ban her from even *breathing* in Steve's vicinity.

With a lopsided grin, he nodded and slipped down the drain pipe, and not a moment too soon. Louise Hobbs entered a second after, frowning with her hands on her hips. "I heard voices..."

"Sounds like a personal problem, mom."

"I'm serious! Do you have a friend with you?"

Sweeping her arm to show off that no, nobody was around, Abigail managed to smile reassuringly. "As if I'd have someone over now – that'd mean sharing your awesome pancakes!"

"Brown noser." With a fond smile, Louise wrapped an arm around Abigail's shoulders and began leading her into the hall. "Your father should be joining us soon, so in the meantime, please help me set the table."

"Dad's up, too?"

"Last time I checked, he was tinkering with something in the garage...putting tools away, I believe."

Abigail's stomach flipped. The girls were kept at her father's cabin in Duluth, but he often brought their remains home to be used creatively.

"Did he seem okay?"

Louise eyed her daughter strangely. "Now why wouldn't he be okay?"

"No reason, he just...he told me he hasn't been sleeping well lately."

"Well now that you mention it, he *did* seem a little tired, but-

"Hey there, puffin!"

Abigail practically halted in her tracks. If it weren't for her mother's arm around her, she would've refused to keep walking.

"How's my special girl today, huh?"

Abigail's mouth worked, but no sound came out.

"That tired, eh? That's alright, I'm fine with doing most of the talking." With a grin, Hobbs began regaling Louise with how well their hunt had gone, and that they now had a ton of deer meat in the garage freezer.

Abigail's stomach flipped.

Louise, however, seemed absolutely ecstatic. "Oh, that's wonderful, honey! I always enjoy this time of year, 'cause I barely even have to do any cooking!"

Abigail pressed her lips together in a tight, trembling line. It was true that Hobbs had always cooked during hunting season, but this time around, he undoubtedly didn't want Louise messing with the evidence.

"How about some deer sausage for our pancakes?" Hobbs offered. "I can go get some right now."

Louise moved to agree, but Abigail quickly shook her head. "No, um...no thank you."

Hobbs spared her a cold look. "Now what have I told you about letting the deer go to waste?"

Abigail looked uncomfortably toward Louise, then recited, "Eating her is honoring her. Otherwise, it's just...i-it's just murder."

"That's right. So let's not let that doe go to waste."

As Hobbs walked off, Abigail released the breath she hadn't been

aware of holding.

Abigail sat out in the garage, knowing that this particular phone would be the most private. Her parents were currently listening to records in the living room, so she knew she had a little time until they were done – specifically, until her dad's Jim Croce album ended. That was always the one they played last.

Anxiously twisting the phone cord around her finger, Abigail nearly chickened out when she heard a chipper, "Hello?" on the other end.

"Um...Steve? It's...i-it's Abigail."

"Calling as promised, I see! Uh...*hear?*"

With a wry smile, she rolled her eyes and agreed, "Yes, as promised. I wasn't really sure what you wanted, but I figured it'd be rude if I didn't follow up."

"Well, an account of the breakfast I missed might be nice."

Glancing toward the freezer of deer meat – no, *Jessica* – Abigail felt a queasy wave rush over her and she shuddered. "Don't worry, it was nothing special. Oatmeal was the primary offender."

Steve made a gagging noise. "Yeah, you're right – my dry toast was *far* preferable."

With a soft laugh, Abigail began to anxiously shift on the garage steps. "So were you serious about that party tonight?"

Steve chuckled. "Now I know I may be new here and all, but parties are something I *never* joke about. And besides, it might be nice to go out and forget your problems, y'know? 'Cause clearly, there's a lot that's wrong in your life right now, and you deserve to just forget for a while."

Abigail exhaled slowly. "Yeah...I guess you're right."

"Pick you up at eight?"

Abigail chewed her lip. "In a car, or?"

"Yeah, of course a car! It'd be a little hard to escort you on a bike," Steve teased.

Nervously glancing over her shoulder, Abigail shook her head. "That won't work...my parents would notice."

"Oh, but-"

"Marissa's my neighbor, so I'll just sneak out and meet you at the party. Go ahead and bring that six pack that we didn't drink, too."

Steve grinned. "Man, have I truly corrupted you, or have you always been this rebellious?"

Abigail had to smile. "Tell yourself whatever your ego needs to hear. I'll see you at eight."

Hanging the phone up on the wall, she spared the freezer one last glance before rushing back into the house.

Sitting by Marissa, Abigail's features were lit by a bonfire that she and several other classmates gathered around. Things were mostly subdued for now, but a few teenagers were already tipsy. At least nobody would notice how much she *very much* did not want to be there.

Swallowing past the dryness of her throat, Abigail sipped her beer without truly tasting. As far as she was concerned, she needed something a *lot* stronger.

"Ugh, ex alert," Marissa complained. "You would think he wouldn't be so quick to show off. After all, I know his actual dick size, and trust me – it is *not* worth bragging about."

Abigail could only nod. Prior to her leaving the house, Jessica's disappearance had been plastered all over the news, and now Abigail found that she couldn't overcome the sinking feeling in her stomach. This was her first kill. No...her first *assisted* kill, but the blood was still on her hands all the same, wasn't it?

A new presence came upon the circle then, and Marissa looked up when Steve appeared with a grin and a wave. And, Abigail noticed, the promised six pack. "Friends in need?" he asked, picking off one of the beers and waving it by his cheek.

Abigail plastered on a smile and motioned to the fold-out chair beside her.

"What took you so long?" Marissa prompted. "I mean, I totally threw this party for Troy, but after a while, his testosterone starts to bore me."

Troy hooted from across the bonfire, proving her statement while Marissa rolled her eyes.

"See what I mean? He can't carry on a normal conversation when he's with his friends."

"I can't speak for Steve, but I needed to wait for my parents to drive me here," one of the girls spoke up. "All these abductions have them really freaked out."

Marissa rolled her eyes. "Oh, *please*. We can't get abducted in a group like this. You're just being paranoid. Isn't that right, Steve?" Her cat-like gaze gleamed, as it often did while talking to boys. "My house seems plenty safe to me."

Abigail's lips spread into a nervous little smile. "No offense, Rissa, but I really don't think anyone wants to talk about this right now."

"Yeah," Steve agreed, smiling as he sat down alongside her. "I think they'd *much* rather keep talking about me. Besides, I won't let anything happen to you lovely ladies."

Marissa's expression grew wolfish. "I think you're right," she cooed. "So if we're allowed to talk about you, what size is your-?"

"Easy for you to say," one of the other girls said to Steve. "You're a *guy* – this nutjob's clearly targeting girls."

"We're safe," Abigail gritted, trying to keep the irritation and nerves from her voice. "The news said he always abducts on Fridays –

it's *Saturday*, so whoever he chose is already gone."

Marissa scoffed. "Wow, obsessed much? Even *I* didn't know all that, and I make sure that everyone's business is my own – *including* creepy, perverted old psychopaths."

"He's *not*..." Trailing off, Abigail grimly pressed her lips together. "He's not a *pervert*, the news has already said he doesn't do anything weird to the bodies."

"Well how do *they* know? None of the girls have been found yet!"

Stomach churning, Abigail knew all too well that her father had to be doing *something* with the bodies, but she just wasn't sure what. Hobbs refused to let her in on the final steps. "Look, can we just like...play a game, or something? I'm tired of talking about this."

Marissa's eyes gleamed. "What, like truth or dare? Spin the bottle? Seven minutes in heaven?"

"There isn't a closet out here."

"So what? I'm content to make-out on a bed of leaves!"

"So am I," Steve interjected, hoping to at least return some of Abigail's good humor.

It worked. She laughed softly, though it never quite reached her eyes. "I'm not so sure everyone *else* wants twigs in their hair, but to each their own."

Wiggling her brows, Marissa announced, "Well, I know how to use a beer bottle in more ways than one, so I think just about anything will help as a much-needed distraction. Steve, since you're the cute one – well, Abby is too, but whatever – *you* can pick what we do."

Steve arched a brow. "Uhh, truth or dare...though I somehow have a feeling I'll regret that decision."

"Truth or *dare*, you say? My specialty!"

While the two bantered back and forth, Abigail's stomach continued

to churn and flop. Despite the conversation finally returning to more normal, mindless topics, the height of her adrenaline had officially caused her to feel lightheaded. Shooting up from her seat, she drew in a sharp breath and said, "I...I-I need some air. Excuse me for a minute."

Before anyone could argue, Abigail had already begun walking off toward the driveway with brisk, shaking steps. It didn't take long for Steve to pursue.

"Hey!" he called, jogging until he was at her side. "Are you alright?"

His voice dripped with concern, and it killed Abigail that he cared. *You shouldn't*, she bitterly thought. *I'm a monster*.

"I'm okay," she mumbled instead. "I just feel a little dizzy from the beer, that's all."

"You sure?"

"Yes, thank you."

Brow knitting with skepticism, Steve laid his hand against the small of Abigail's back, then gently began to steer her toward his car. "C'mon, let's sit on the hood," he prompted. "Maybe you can get your equilibrium back on track."

In spite of the situation, Abigail had to laugh. *"Equilibrium? Wow... Glad to see you paid attention in science class."*

Steve grinned. "I'm more than just my good looks, you realize."

"Yeah," she agreed, "I'm beginning to think that maybe you are." Hoisting herself up to sit on the hood of his Mustang, she smiled sadly and leaned her elbows on her knees. "You didn't have to follow me, you know, but thank you."

"I wanted to. I *did* only come here because of you, you realize."

Flushing beneath his gaze, Abigail lowered her eyes and self-consciously tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. "Why? I'm nothing special."

"Yes, you are." Steve's smile grew soft and lopsided. "It's kind of funny, isn't it? How the smart people can always be oblivious to their own gifts?"

Abigail fell at a loss for words. She'd never particularly *liked* herself, so it was difficult to look at her accomplishments and traits with pride. "I've been so mean to you," she whispered, immediately awash with shame. "How could you ever-?"

"To be fair, *everyone's* mean to me at first. I'm kind of a douchebag." Steve laughed then, shrugging good-naturedly. Now moving to sit alongside her, he gave her arm a gentle nudge. "At first I just thought you were cute, 'cause...y'know...that's kind of how attraction works, but then I realized you had a lot of layers and this well-hidden spark. I've never met someone who wants their entire *personality* kept secret, but for some reason, you try to hide all your good parts."

Abigail bit her lip, a shiver of panic rising through her. "You can see all that from just a few talks?"

Steve smiled sheepishly. "I know it sounds weird – stupid, even – but I've always had a good intuition when it comes to people. And just...I dunno. I think you're pretty amazing."

A swell of emotion formed in the pit of her stomach, and tearfully, Abigail's lips lifted into a soft, fond little smile.

"Did I say the wrong thing?"

"No." She shook her head, hesitating before touching his hand. "It's probably the first '*right*' thing I've heard all week."

Uncertain, Steve gave her hand a gentle squeeze, then he scooted in closer.

Almost instantly, Abigail felt a spike of panic. Was this what her father had always warned her about? Was Steve going to...?

No, Abigail decided, *she was going to do it herself*.

Taking hold of his cheeks, Abigail urged her mouth over his in a clumsy, gentle kiss that had him fumbling for where to properly place

his hands. First she felt him touch her hair, then her waist, before finally settling at the small of her back. Curling his arms around her, Steve pressed his mouth strongly into hers and drank of her more fully.

That was when a pair of headlights cut across the yard.

Startled, Abigail broke the kiss and shielded her eyes, only to realize it was her *father's* car.

Shit.

Leaping up from the Mustang, Abigail subconsciously clutched at her chest while the car rolled to a stop.

"What is it?" Steve asked, reaching for her hand. "What's wrong?"

"My dad..."

Seeming to understand, Steve also rose and peered out at the tall, foreboding figure furiously getting out of the driver's seat.

"Let me guess: overprotective?"

"Insanely." *And that was putting it lightly.* "If you want to get off easy, you should go now."

"No way, I'm staying put. Especially since I plan on sticking around for as long as you'll have me."

Fearfully, Abigail nodded. She didn't know how much her father had seen, but the fact she'd sneaked out was more than enough for him to crucify her.

"Abigail!"

She cringed, feeling Steve's hand reassuringly grip hers.

Hobbs stalked toward them then, his face red and his eyes flashing. "*This* is your study session, is it?" Abigail opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off. "Come with me. We're going home."

Abigail moved to acquiesce, but to her horror, Steve took that opportunity to intervene. He smiled and stuck out his hand, appearing boyish and good-natured.

"Hi, Mr. Hobbs, I'm Steve Harrington. Abby's told me a lot about you, so I'm glad we can finally meet face-to-face."

Within the moonlight, Hobbs' eyes appeared like ice. Ignoring Steve's offered hand, he took hold of Abigail's arm and tugged her off toward the car.

"Hey!" Steve called. "Sir, she did nothing wrong!"

Hobbs rounded about in an instant. "Oh, I'm fully aware," he seethed. "I know *exactly* what you were interested in."

Steve appeared aghast, and Hobbs took advantage of his stunned silence to continue dragging Abigail toward the car. She could feel everyone's eyes on her and did her best not to cry.

Once they were in the car, Hobbs turned on the ignition and became oddly calm. "You disobeyed me, Abigail."

"I know dad, I'm sorry. It's just-"

"What have I *told* you about boys?"

"This one's different! He-"

"No." Hobbs wore a cynical smile. "He's got you fooled, puffin, because *no* man is honorable."

"Not even you?"

Scowling, Hobbs ignored the question and began easing the car around to edge down the driveway.

"Dad, you embarrassed me..."

"I was just trying to protect you, Abigail. Everything I do in this life is for *you*."

Thinking of the cold, dead girls scattered into pieces in *her* name, Abigail clammed up and held herself tightly about the middle.

"Someday, you'll thank me. I know that it's going to be hard, but you need to cut that boy loose."

Abigail felt her heart drop. "Dad, no! Aside from Marissa, he's the only one who understands me. We both-"

"I understand you, and *I* am all that you need," Hobbs reminded her. Reaching over the divide, he took hold of her trembling hand and squeezed her fingers. "I love you, puffin, and you need to remember that everything – *everything* – I do is for the best. One day, you'll finally understand."

With tears blurring her vision, Abigail bowed her head and sniffed. "What if people talk? You didn't come in quietly..."

"If they talk, it *won't* be about our doe."

"You mean Jessica."

The grip on her hand suddenly turned painful, and she yelped, startled by the sharp, radiating pressure in her bones. "Dad! Dad, you're hurting me!"

"I told you *not* to name the does, Abigail. I can't keep you safe if you insist on ignoring my instructions!" Releasing her hand, he instantly became remorseful, and his fingers gently stroked along her throbbing hand with guilt. "I'm so sorry, puffin," he whispered. "I'm never going to hurt you again."

Biting her lip to keep from bursting into tears, Abigail moved away from him and leaned her weight against the car door.

Pulling out onto the road, Hobbs glanced her way before sighing. "You were careless tonight. When I went up to check on you a while ago, you weren't there. And then I heard music, so I came out to investigate. I'm so disappointed in you, puffin. You're better than these people."

No, she grudgingly thought, *I'm not*.

"Tomorrow, we can go out to that old diner we used to frequent – remember the one with the milkshakes? – and make a whole day of hiking and birdwatching. How does that sound?"

Sniffing, Abigail held herself around the middle and shrugged. "Nice, I suppose."

"Wonderful! Maybe your mom can pack us a lunch. It's been quite a while since we had a picnic, hasn't it?"

"Yes, dad." It truly amazed her how he could go from utterly *terrifying* to loving in two seconds flat.

Yet again, Hobbs reached over and touched her hand, and Abigail cringed. "Just me and my girl," he said approvingly. "Me and my girl."

Notes for the Chapter:

Finally! For a while there, I honestly didn't think I'd be able to finish this, but at long last, I got inspiration and wrote this up in a couple days! And I'm happy to announce that the next chapter will be the last, so things will finally be wrapped up soon. It'll take place a few months in the future (mostly because Abigail assisted her father with many girls, so since Jessica was her first assist, I didn't think it'd be realistic if I just ended it with one). Anyway, I'm sure I lost most of, if not all of my readership with my poking around/slowness, but I appreciate all of you all the same! Thanks so much for reading! Comments are love!

5. Fractured

Despite Hobbs' warning, Abigail had continued to see Steve in secret. During the past four months, it was like a dizzy merry-go-round of joy and pleasure in ways neither had ever experienced. Abigail's repression and Steve's neglect had made them both skeptical of affection, but there was no mistaking that theirs was genuine.

Hobbs' body count had continued to rise – eight now, the last time Abigail had checked – but Steve's love and support had somehow kept her afloat. If she kept her focus on him, it was almost as if she wasn't trapped in a never-ending cycle of lies and deceit.

"Ice cream at Dolly's?"

Abigail smiled, holding the garage phone as she twirled the cord around her finger. "I'll have to stay with my parents for a while longer, but why don't you stop by in maybe fifteen minutes? Park up by your usual spot, and I'll come out and meet you as soon as I can."

Steve grinned. "I really *have* turned you into a deviant, haven't I?"

"A regular badass, I think you mean," Abigail quipped. When he laughed, she promised, "I'll see you soon."

"You'd better."

Hanging up, Abigail retained her chipper demeanor as she headed for the kitchen. Her parents were already hard at work fixing breakfast, and she flashed them both a smile as she reached for a stack of plates. That was when the kitchen phone rang.

Worried that it might be Steve, Abigail quickly rushed over and answered the call. "Hello?"

"Is Mr. Garrett Jacob Hobbs available, please?"

Bemused, Abigail blinked as she tried to process the accented voice – it was unlike anything she had heard before, and she somehow doubted this was one of Hobbs' work friends. Nevertheless, she answered him, "Just a minute," and turned toward her father. "Dad,

it's for you."

"Finish the eggs and sausage, puffin," Hobbs instructed. Now taking the phone from her hand, he lifted it to his ear and canted his head. "Hello?"

Abigail took hold of the spatula and poked at the eggs. Despite it being rude to eavesdrop, she couldn't help but feel ill at ease by the quiet, thick tension that had suddenly filled the room. "Dad?"

Slowly, Hobbs hung up the phone. "Wrong number," he mumbled.

"What? That seemed a little long for a wrong number," Louise said.

"I'll be right back," Hobbs announced. "Lou, honey, can you help me with something, please?"

Wiping her hands off on her jeans, she nodded and moved away from the toast she'd been buttering. As they headed out into the hall, Abigail turned off the stove and moved the skillet to a cool burner. That was when she heard the screams.

"Mom?!"

Racing out into the hallway, a sharp gasp caught in Abigail's throat when she saw her father, hacking away at her mother's jugular while she choked and gargled on her own blood. Abigail yearned to scream – to *run* – but found she couldn't move.

Hobbs lumbered past her, opened the door, and then shoved Louise's fading body out onto the front porch before locking her out. As Hobbs seized Abigail's wrist and dragged her back toward the kitchen, she briefly caught sight of a wide-eyed, bespectacled agent rushing toward the house. Again, Abigail wanted to scream, but somehow found herself unable.

With Hobbs' bloody hunting knife perched beneath her chin, Abigail tensed and whimpered when he restrained her from movement.

"It's okay," he whispered in her ear. "I'm so sorry, puffin, I'm so sorry – just hold still, and I can make the pain stop, I promise."

Bang!

The front door kicked in, and a warbling sense of hope filled Abigail's chest. The agent from earlier rushed inside, his gun unsteady as he bellowed, "Mr. Garrett Jacob Hobbs! FBI!"

Hobbs squeezed Abigail in a backwards embrace. "I'm gonna make it all go away," he promised. Though when he moved to cut her throat, the gun went off and struck Hobbs in the shoulder.

Abigail cried out, stunned, before she went hurtling to the speckled floor. Almost instantly, she realized blood was gushing from the deep wound on her neck. *Oh God, he'd cut her, oh God, she was going to die!*

A succession of eight pops followed, then she yelped when Hobbs slumped down against the counter, riddled with bullets and barely clinging to life. She gaped back at him, choking on her own blood as the agent fell down at her side. His hands moved to her neck, but she could only focus on her father struggling for breath.

Another man entered the scene then, and Abigail found herself growing increasingly dizzy. Hands poked and prodded at her, and then a pair of expert fingers pinched at the right place to stem her blood flow.

"Dad," she choked. "Dad, I...I'm so sorry, I..."

"Do not speak," the man holding her throat admonished. Even amidst her delirium, Abigail realized it was him...*the man on the phone.*

Feeling a spike in her pulse, Abigail whimpered as the EMTs arrived just in time. They coaxed both men into stepping aside, and then they set to work on prepping her for the ambulance.

Steve checked his watch with impatience. He knew Abigail was going to be late, but he hadn't realized just *how* late. Maybe he should brave it and scope out her house?

While he contemplated this, an ambulance and two police cars went peeling down the road alongside him. Oh, God... Were they headed to...?

Not allowing himself to finish the thought, Steve started up his car and went tearing after them. With the taste of bile in his mouth, his heart dropped when he saw the vehicles all turn up Abigail's driveway.

Slamming on the brakes, Steve immediately parked his car and went racing up the gravelly pathway. Two agents were there to stop him.

"No, you don't understand!" he cried. "My girlfriend lives here, and I just-"

"Sorry, kid," the man on the left said. "This place is a crime scene, so we can't let you in."

Steve paled. "Oh, God... *Please*, you need to at least tell me if she's alright!"

In the distance, he could see two EMTs wheeling Abigail toward the ambulance on a stretcher. He once more tried to break through, but the agents were quick to catch him.

"We said *no!*" the female agent snapped. "If you leave us your contact information, we can let you know which hospital she'll be staying in. Until then, I'm afraid you'll only be getting in the way."

Steve's eyes puddled as if he'd been struck. "C'mon, haven't you ever been in love with someone before? Wouldn't *you* do everything you could to be with them?"

The woman's expression softened, but she shook her head. "Sorry, but no. It'd go against our policy, and it's *imperative* that we ensure safety and zero contamination."

The male agent handed Steve a card. "In an hour or two, give this number a call, and someone should be able to fill you in on the girl's condition."

Steve nodded gratefully. "Thank you... We'll be in touch."

When he returned to his car, he doubled over and screamed into the steering wheel.

"Abigail's being kept at St. Mary's. I want to go over there after dinner."

Steve's mother appeared concerned, her eyes nervously flitting over toward her husband. "Oh, dear... Well, this certainly is bad timing, isn't it?"

Steve's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Well..." Still looking at Craig, Martha plastered on a smile and clasped her hands. "As you know, your father and I went on that business trip a few months ago."

"And?"

"And, things went very well for your father."

Tucking his glasses into his breast pocket, Craig almost appeared *snide* when he explained, "I got a job offer in Hawkins, Indiana. They were so impressed that they want me to transfer immediately."

Steve's mouth fell open. "But...b-but what about Abigail? What about school? I've finally found a place I belong, and now you want me to uproot for some shitty, hole-in-the-ground town?"

"You watch your mouth!" Red-faced, Craig pointed his finger. "When that girl wakes up, you're going to tell her that it's been swell, but you're moving. I didn't think much of her anyway."

"Oh honey, be nice," Martha admonished. "That poor thing has been through so much!" Looking to Steve, who quite frankly was ready to commit murder, she reached across the table and touched his hand. "You're eighteen, honey, so before you know it, you'll be able to move

out. And when you've got the means to do so, maybe you can come back here and be with Abigail."

"The sooner, the better," Craig agreed.

Eyes stinging, Steve swallowed around the lump in his throat and nodded. "May I be excused, please?"

"Of course, honey."

Not waiting for his father's approval, Steve rose from the table and rushed off to grab his car keys.

- Three days later -

"Follow the light for me."

Tired and obedient, Abigail glanced toward the flashlight one way, then the other as the doctor moved it back and forth.

"Very good," he praised. "Can you remember what happened?"

"Yes," Abigail rasped. Due to the knife having severed her windpipe, it currently hurt to talk. The bandage on her throat bobbed as she swallowed, and with a shaking breath, she asked, "Are my parents okay?"

Tucking the flashlight into his coat pocket, the doctor sighed. "I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to discuss that," he said. "The FBI requested that I leave all the details to them, so you'll have to get your answers when they arrive for questioning. And given how they've been informed of your condition, that should be any time now."

Abigail shook her head. "I don't want to speak with them. Ever since I woke up, I've been poked and prodded and interrogated by total strangers. If I have to be poked and prodded and interrogated by even *more* strangers, I'm going to scream. So please... Let me see a familiar face."

The doctor frowned. "Just who did you have in mind?"

Steve was surprised and overjoyed to get the call. He hadn't realized Abigail had finally woken up, but now that he had this bit of news guiding his mood, he had a lighter air to him as he traveled in to St. Mary's.

The staff was friendly (perhaps *too* friendly, he decided), and as a young nurse led him into Abigail's room, his heart swelled at the sight of her.

"Hey," he greeted. "You look..."

"Like hell, I know," Abigail rasped. Smiling with tears in her eyes, she reached out for him. "Come sit with me?"

"Of course." Moving over to the chair at her side, Steve sank down and curled his hand fondly over hers. "I was so worried about you," he whispered. "The media's saying awful, awful things, but they don't know shit."

"I don't care what they say," Abigail agreed, even though she did. "They didn't know my dad...they don't know *me*."

Squeezing her hand, Steve nodded. "I'm so sorry I didn't see the signs."

"How could you have? No one did...not even me or my mom."

Drawing her fingers to his lips, Steve kissed her knuckles and exhaled. "I really don't know what to say...looking back, it kind of makes sense, but-"

"Please don't analyze my family," Abigail pleaded. "I'm sure the media's doing more than enough of that."

"You're right. I'm sorry." Gently rubbing her hand in between his

palms, Steve asked, "So what did you want to talk about? When the orderly called, he said you had something you wanted to discuss with me."

Abigail paled, now guiltily lowering her eyes. "Maybe later...right now, I want to hear something normal. Please tell me about your weekend."

Now it was Steve's turn to appear guilty. He wasn't sure if on top of her trauma, she could handle his life-altering announcement. But when she looked back at him with her wide, pleading eyes, he knew he could never lie to her.

"Abigail," he whispered, lifting a hand to gently brush back her hair, "I got some pretty bad news this morning."

She swallowed. "What kind of bad news?"

"The domestic kind. My dad got a job in Hawkins, Indiana, but it's okay, 'cause I can eventually get enough money to come back to you. And then maybe we can move in together, and-"

"I want to break up."

A silence overcame the room then, thick and suffocating, and Abigail's eyes grew wet as she tensed her hands in her lap.

Steve felt as if he'd been struck in the chest. "I...w-what?" Nearly collapsing back in his seat, he withdrew far enough to regard her more clearly. "Why would you want...? You don't mean..."

"I do," Abigail evenly said. "I want to break up."

"But *why*?" Steve weakly asked. "Don't you love me?"

Abigail's chin quivered, and for just a moment, she nearly lost her resolve. Since she *did* love him, she needed to do this – she *needed* to free him before it was too late.

"No," she whispered. A slight crack filled Abigail's voice, and she quickly shook her head. "No, I don't love you."

Steve swallowed with a low, disbelieving scoff. "You're a liar," he accused. "I've *always* known when you're lying."

"Get out," Abigail pleaded. "You may think you know me, but you don't."

Steve's hurt expression finally turned cold. "That's an awfully presumptuous thing for a stranger to say."

Abigail drew in a quaking breath. Whether he meant it or not, he was spitting out the exact same words she'd said to him during their first conversation, and with such biting venom that she swore she felt her heart break.

"Steve, please leave," she begged. "I can't do this right now."

Steve, don't go. I love you.

With a bitter laugh, he rose and gave her a sarcastic salute. "Don't worry, I'm gone. You'll never have to see me again."

Steve left the room with a slam of the door, and once Abigail was certain he was out of sight, she doubled over and burst into tears.

- Several months later -

"Steve? Um...Steve, honey? There are some men here to see you."

Martha sounded nervous, which in turn made *Steve* nervous as he headed down the stairs. Spotting his mother with two men – a weary, bespectacled man and a tall, grave-faced African American – his brow creased with concern. "What's going on?"

"Steve Harrington," the latter man said, "I'm Special Agent Jack Crawford, head of the behavioral unit of the FBI. This is one of our criminal profilers, Will Graham, and we're here to discuss a few things, if you wouldn't mind."

Steve's mouth suddenly felt like cotton. "Uh...sure, what's this about?"

"Abigail Hobbs." Gesturing toward the sitting room, Jack asked Martha, "May we?"

"Oh! Oh yes, of course. Would you lovely gentleman like some coffee?"

"Please."

"None for me, thank you," Will said, sounding soft and defeated. Clearly, something was weighing quite heavily on his mind.

While Martha bustled off toward the kitchen, Steve uneasily led the two agents into the sitting room. Taking the couch across from two over-stuffed, high-backed chairs, Steve folded his hands and nervously leaned forward on the edge of his seat.

"Look, if this is about what happened with Abigail's dad, I honestly can't help you. Was I surprised to learn that she had been living with a serial killer? Yes. But that doesn't mean-"

"Steve, we're not here to interrogate you." Will's voice was soft and almost soothing. "Given your response, I'm going to assume that you've been unaware of Abigail's tragic activity over the past several months." When Steve balked, Will continued, "She was manipulated by a Dr. Hannibal Lecter – I take it you've at least heard of him? – and he faked her death to keep her out of the FBI's path. You see, she helped her father with those girls, so Hannibal took an interest in her potential."

Steve felt his heart drop. "Wait...she *helped*? But..."

"Not directly with the kills, no, but she found out basic information – where the girls would be, where they lived – so that her father could come for them without incident." Will's gaze grew pained. "She felt she had no *choice*, Steve – her father was sick, and he told her several times that if he didn't kill those girls, he'd have to kill her."

"Oh, my God..." Dropping his face down into his hands, Steve shuddered and shook his head. It was all beginning to make sense now – Abigail's behavior, her actually admitting her father was *sick* –

all of it.

"That brings us to the point of our visit," Jack said.

Nodding, Will continued, "As you may or may not know, Dr. Lecter is currently the world's most wanted man. When we realized what he was, he felt cornered and attacked four innocent people. One person died. And while we were searching Dr. Lecter's home, we found a note addressed to you. It seems that while Abigail was living in his basement, she'd written to you and intended to mail this."

Will reached into his pocket, but Steve immediately shook his head.

"No, no, I don't want it," he pleaded. "She made it very clear that she didn't want to see me again, so-

"She won't," Jack evenly cut in. "We've kept it out of the headlines for now, but the victim who died during Lecter's attack was Abigail Hobbs. I hate to be the one to tell you this, Mr. Harrington, but she just couldn't pull through this time around."

"Jack and I were also there," Will said, his eyes filling up with tears. "We were victims number two and three... I tried to save her, Steve, but she'd just lost too much blood."

As Steve gaped back at them in stunned disbelief, it took him a moment to realize he was crying. Wet, hot tears coursed down his cheeks, and his body quickly began to rack with sobs.

"I can't," he choked. "I can't look at it, I just *can't*..."

"And you don't have to," Will assured him, "but we're going to leave this here for you to do with as you see fit." Face ashen and filled with regret, he leaned over and placed the letter onto the coffee table. "I loved her too, Steve. She was a lovely, sweet girl who unfortunately attracted the attention of a very bad man. And given how Lecter's 'love' reflected that of her father's, she didn't stand a chance."

Martha came in then, bright and chipper with her coffee mugs. "Who likes cream and sugar in theirs?" she asked. Looking at her son's tears and then the stoic, unreadable faces of the two agents, she instantly lost her smile and gasped. "Oh! Oh dear, is everything alright?"

"I don't think we'll be needing that coffee after all, Mrs. Harrington," Jack said. Now motioning to Will, the two men rose from their chairs. "Thank you for your hospitality."

To Steve, Will added, "Take care of yourself – I'm so sorry I couldn't do more for her."

After the men had left, Steve glossed over his mother's questions in favor of solitude. With Abigail's letter in hand, he went upstairs and shut himself in his room. Nancy would probably be calling soon – she often liked to talk with him in the evenings – but he knew he wouldn't be able to speak with his girlfriend. Not right now.

With tears still streaking his face, Steve unfolded the letter and read:

Steve:

I don't know why I'm writing you...I'm not even sure if you still like me, but I needed to get some things off my chest. I found some paper in Hannibal's escritoire, and I know he'll be home soon, so I don't have very long to write. I probably won't even find the courage to send this, 'cause I know what he'll do, but it still feels good to vent. I'm lost and scared and I don't know why this is happening. I'm not even sure I know who I am anymore. He chose me, but I didn't ask to be chosen. Why aren't you here? Why haven't you come looking for me? I know we left things on bad terms, but couldn't you tell I was lying? Please, Steve, I feel so alone, please don't let me be alone anymore. I'm sorry. I know I'm a terrible person, and that I don't deserve your forgiveness, but you're the only one keeping me sane right now. Please don't hate me. Please come find me. I wish I could've had the courage to keep you in my life, but I didn't deserve you. I'm too cowardly and broken. I just wanted you to know that I love you and I never hated you. I hope you're okay, and that maybe one day, we can live together in that apartment you spoke of, with dappled sunsets and house plants and a small cat with bright blue eyes.

I have to go now.

-Abigail

Steve stared down at the open letter for a long time. With a sharp, tight pain in his chest, he thought of Abigail and her sunshiney smile,

and the way her nose wrinkled when she was deep in thought, and how he would never be able to see her sweet face again.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

"Stevie, honey?" Martha poked her head into his room, her gaze soft and uncertain. She only called him Stevie when she knew he was upset, but somehow Steve was appreciative in that moment.

"She's gone, mom," he softly said. "They told me Abigail died."

Lightly stepping into the room, Martha shut the door and had a seat alongside him. "Oh honey, I know it hurts, but-"

"*Why* didn't she tell me? If she'd just *told* me, maybe I could've helped her! Maybe..." Trailing off, Steve choked on his own words and miserably wiped his eyes. "I just don't get it, mom. In this letter, she finally admitted that she loved me, but I guess that wasn't enough for her to trust in me, too."

Martha's eyes softened. "Sweetie, I'm sure she was just scared. She was being abused by her own father, so it's difficult to turn on someone you love. And maybe, in her own way, she thought she was protecting you."

"But what about her?" Steve weakly asked. "Why didn't she ever think about who could protect *her*? I hate that I was so goddamn stupid, because even though I *did* feel uncomfortable and suspicious about her dad, I decided he was just oddly overbearing."

Martha gently rubbed his shoulder. "Blaming yourself won't bring her back – you *know* that."

Suddenly, it seemed as though all the energy had drained from Steve's body. He slumped against his mom in a defeated heap, his eyes wet and his mouth trembling as he shook his head. "And this other guy...what are the odds of her being manipulated by not one, but *two* serial killers? How did she end up so lost?"

"It's possible that she felt guilty...that maybe she even felt she deserved it," Martha said, "but I agree. It's very tragic and unusual."

"In her letter, she sounded so hurt and scared and confused," he whispered. "I just wish I could've been there for her."

"I think you were," Martha whispered. "You may've not been able to physically be there, but from what I've gathered, she certainly kept you there with her spiritually."

Steve smiled, his eyes glistening with tears. "Thanks, mom."

Gently, she curled him into her side and stroked his hair. "Tomorrow will be better."

Steve couldn't bring himself to agree. Any day without Abigail would never be "better," but he would learn to live with only her memory. And then, when his heart was far less battered and bruised, he would finally look at "dappled sunsets and blue-eyed cats" again and smile.

I commissioned the super talented jewelry373 to draw Steve/Abigail! Check out all her links/the source (especially since I can't get the site to stop cutting off part of the pic)! <https://www.deviantart.com/art-gem/art/Steve-x-Abigail-commission-812225796>



Notes for the Chapter:

This took quite a bit of editing, but it's finally done! Originally, it wasn't supposed to end so tragically (it was basically just supposed to end where S1 of both Hannibal and Stranger Things began), but then I realized I wanted to see what Steve's reaction would've been to Abigail's death. It hurt to write, but it seemed to be a more fitting stopping place than their breakup. **Also, if anyone wants to write this ship, PLEASE do and let me know!** The tragic thing about writing a crossover couple is you're basically the only one who ships them! lol

Anyway, I feel like most of my readers are familiar with Hannibal, seeing how quite a few of my fics pertain to that fandom, but if you have any questions, feel free to ask! Hope you all enjoyed! And as always, comments are love! ;) You can find me on Tumblr at musicboxmemories.tumblr.com.

Author's Note:

The fan vid I made for Steve/Abigail can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJRuismXzB4> Let me just say that it's NOT going to be how this fic plays out. In that particular vidlet, I had to explore Steve in a negative light for the MEP theme. It can also be found under the "mine" tag on my Tumblr, musicboxmemories. Thanks so much for reading, and remember: comments are love! ;)